

SETH VISHANDAS

A GREAT PHILANTHROPIST

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Compiled by:

Khadim Hussain Soomro

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To

Sain G.M. Sayed

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

It is not the general practice in our country to remember our benefactors. There have been many illustrious men and women who have given their all to society but they have been but forgotten. Even their names have been obliterated from public memory. This is the height of ingratitude. The present book is an attempt to revive the memory of the great sons and daughters of the soil. Seth Vishandas was one such man. His was a life devoted to social service. It would be no exaggeration to say that with a faith that moves mountains, Vishandas transformed Sindhi society of his time. This book is a humble tribute to a man who served his people without considerations of caste or creed.

Khadim Hussain Soomro

FOREWORD

It is rather difficult, to write the foreword to a book which deals with the life and achievements of a great grandfather I never saw. From what I have heard about him and on the basis of family accounts, he was a man of the world and, at the same time, a man of God.

He made millions by dint of hard work and although he spent generously on social welfare projects and on private charity, he still left a fortune for his descendants. He had little or no formal education but received spiritual guidance from his mentor, Guru Gulabdas.

He was a great connoisseur of classical music and dancing and could sing well himself. He had a perfect understanding of the intricacies of these arts. There would be musical session, at his house every evening where renowned singers and dancers of his time would perform. Some musicians, in fact, were permanent members of his retinue. Music was his first love, his very life. He was not in active politics but he attended the first few annual sessions of the All India Congress.

He was deeply religious and subscribed to the Gulabdasi Panth (a Hindu school of thought). He had a few devotees who wrote books on him in Urdu. He was also a reformer and campaigned all his life against decadent social practice. His life

and work chronicles the social history of Bombay/Sindh of his period. In fact, he wrote a book on the subject.

Mr. Khadim Hussain Soomro persuaded me for giving him the background material for this book. I am thankful to him for the hard work he has put in for publishing this volume.

Kishanchand Bharvani

THE BHARVANIS

The Bharvanis are an ancient Sindhi family. Their family tree, Vance is shown as Raghuvash. Maryada Parshotam Shri Ramchander also belongs to the Raghuvansh line. This family, too, originated from the old Raghuvanshi clan.

They are Lohanas who claim to be the descendants of Shri Ramchander's son, Sharlau. Originally, the Lohanas were Kashatris who later became traders. In the beginning, the forebears of this family used to live in some village on the banks of the Indus. They were farmers by profession. Whenever Sindh was invaded by foreigners, they would arm themselves and give battle to the marauders to defend their faith. After the invasion was over, they would resume farming.

This was the era when reciting the vedas, presenting offerings to the Brahmins, worshipping the gods, suffering great physical pain were the means through which one got redemption. The Hindu community was divided into four mutually exclusive sections — the Brahmins the Kashatris, the Vaish and the Shudras — was strictly followed.

A story has come down to us from those days about a family one of whose members, Komal, after abandoning mundane affairs walked to several holy places of pilgrimage. He sought his family's permission which was granted and taking things he would need en-route, he visited temples and other

places of religious importance in Sindh, the Punjab and Uttar Pradesh until he ended up in Kashi. Wherever he went, he sat at the feet of holy men and learnt much from their piety.

In Kashi one day, he saw a saintly man delivering a sermon to people sitting before him under a tree. The saint looked majestic and had a halo of piety around him. Komal also sat down. The godlike man was using simple language which everyone could understand. Komal had never heard anything like it before. This savant was Mahatama Gautam Buddh. After having acquired ultimate knowledge he had set out to share it with the people at large. He told a rapt audience that there was much pain in the world and this pain was born out of man's desire for things mundane. A renunciation of this desire could rid man of pain.

Gautam was the beloved son of Raja Sadudhan of Kapilrastu. The miserable life of the common man aroused great pity in him and renouncing the comforts of a princely life, he left for the woods. He abandoned all known methods of meditation and took station under a tree. At long last, he found the light he was seeking — to acquire peace, one had to take the middle of the road which could free man of the problems of life and death and lead him to Nirvana.

Komal was deeply impressed by Gautam's teachings, and he began moving from place to place like a bhikshu. Wherever he went, he spread Gautam's middle-of-the-road message. Slowly, the people began to see the light of reason and they began to give up their sinful ways. Ahanisa (non-violence) became the ultimate religion.

Slaughtering animals in sacrificial offerings to the gods went on the decline. Meat eating and addiction to drugs were replaced by vegetables, fruits and cereals.

Komal returned home after 15 years and began preaching Buddhism in Sindh. His family also converted to Buddhism and Ahanisa (non-violence) became the accepted religion. Centuries went by and Komal's family continued to live in Sindh and multiplied. Sindh was ruled by Rai family. The capital of Sindh in those days was Aror, a famous city in the centuries gone by. After the Rais, the Brahmin rulers also kept Aror as their capital city. The ruins are to be seen eight Kilometres from Rohri.

The Arab invasion of Sindh took place in AD 711 when the Brahmin Raja Dahar was the ruler. After much bloodshed, the Arabs vanquished Sindh and Dahar was killed in battle. The Hindus fled the vanquished territory. Those who put up resistance were slaughtered and many children and women were sent to Arabia as slaves and concubines.

After Dahar's defeat innumerable men and women crossed the Indus and settled in the Punjab wherever they could find a hospitable place along river banks. These people began to call themselves Arorvansis or the real inhabitants of Aror. The Arorvansis are said to have 450 sub-castes among them being Bhathija, Talreja, Pahuja, Jasuja, Kakreja, Hinduja, Rajpal, Kalthpal, Khatarpal, Bhaj, Suchdev, Nagdev, Vasdev, etc.

After the Arab conquest, many Hindus converted to Islam. They were treated kindly but those who did not renounce their old faith but

wanted to continue to live in Sindh, had to pay Jizya (protection money). When the Arab hold on Sindh waned, parts of the territory were wrested back after an armed struggle and Hindu rule was established in Brahminabad, Thar and Lower Sindh.

After conquering Sindh, the Arabs took areas up to, and including Multan. They went eastward also and attacked Gujarat and Ujjain where they were thwarted by local rulers in 738. After this, the Arab invasions of India ceased.

After the Arab conquest of Sindh, the Bajaj clan also migrated to the Punjab. Several members of this clan were in Raja Dahar's civil and military service. Some soldiers appointed themselves at the fort to guard Dahar's widow. The Arabs laid siege to the fort and when Dahar's devoted soldiers felt that the fort's defences were crumbling, they decided to go down fighting in open combat. Among those who laid down their lives was Rajmal, a member of the Bharvani clan.

The Arorvansis who migrated to the Punjab, faced no difficulty in finding gainful employment and moving up on the social ladder because the area was under Hindu rule.

In AD 991, Sultan Subtagin of Ghazna conquered Peshawar and then he took over the Punjab in AD 1018 to lay the foundations of Muslim rule. The Afghan invasions of India came after about three hundred years of the Arab victories. After Subtagin, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna raided India several times but he would return home each time.

After the Afghan conquest of the Punjab the Arorvansis fanned out to other parts of India. The Bajajs moved to Uttar Pradesh and Rajputana. The Bajajs were mainly traders. The Bharvanis moved from Rajputana to Kutchh from where they traded with Gujarat and Kathiawar by land and by sea with Iran and Arabia.

When Sindh fell under Mughal rule, the Bharvanis returned to Sindh and settled in Thatta and set up trading centres there and in Keti Bander and Kotri. During the Kalhora rule, Khudabad was the capital of Sindh where the Bharvanis later settled. Sanwal Khan Bajaj was the head of the family who had a prosperous business in gold and silver.

During the British period, many Bajajs returned to Sindh. They were goldsmiths in Shikarpur. Some of the Bajajs also lived in Hyderabad and Karachi. They were farmers and traders and some were government servants and lawyers. After 1947, several Bajaj families migrated to India.

Seth Odhu Das of the Bharvani clan had four sons, Sukhdev, Lachhman Das, Ramchand and Bharatraj. Out of them first three remained in Sindh. Seth Sukhdev, the eldest son was member of Constitutional Assembly of Pakistan.

THE BHARVANI FAMILY

The Bharvani were known as Sanwalani Seths. An elder of the family, Seth Sanwalmal Bajaj, used to live in Khudabad early in the 18th century. He was a prosperous jeweller and trader. Sindh was ruled by the Kalhoras and Khudabad was their capital city. The family came to be known as the Sanwalanis after Sanwalmal. Sanwalmal had business interests in Khudabad, old Sukkur, Kotri, Thatta and Ketri Bunder, all of them important trading centres of Sindh in those days.

When the Kalhoras were on the decline, Baloch mauraunders attacked Khudabad in 1768 and put the city to the torch. There was an exodus from the ransacked capital. Sanwalmal and his family found refuge in Unnarpur and resumed their business activities. Sanwalmal died in 1773, leaving behind four sons, Bharomal, Lakhimal, Tolomal and Chhatomal.

After the division of Sanwalmal's property among his heirs, Seth Bharomal and Seth Tolomal decided to live together in Manjho. Bharomal had a son born to him. It was named Khushaldas who in turn got a son, Sangomal who died issueless. Thus there was no issue in the Bharomal family.

Seth Tolomal had two sons, Lakhichand and Moriomal. Lakhimchand had just one son, Nehalchand. Moriomal had two male issues,

Devdas and Jethamal. Devdas died issueless, followed soon after by Moriomal and his son.

Only Nehalchand, Lakhmichand, Jethamal and Moriomal survived. Nehalchand was born in 1855 and Jethamal in 1834. Nehalchand had no issue for several years after his marriage. Jethamal was much younger to him and was brought up like a son by Nehalchand.

After Nehalchand's death, two important members Seth Jethamal and Seth Lilaram ran the family business. Jethamal had three sons of whom Wadhomal died in childhood. The other two, Keshodas and Naomal were born in 1862 and 1866, respectively.

Vishandas had three sons, Harchandrai (b-1862), Srichand (b. 1874) and Odhodas (b. 1879).

Towards the end of his life, Jethamal grew very weak and spent most of his time at home. He died in 1898. Two years later, Lilaram also passed away. After that, the Bharvani family was left with only Seth Vishandas and his three sons, Harchandrai, Srichand and Odhodas and Seth Jethamal's two sons, Keshodas and Naomal. The family business was in the hands of Seth Vishandas. In 1900, there was a cholera epidemic in Manjho and the Bharvanis moved to Karachi and settled there permanently.

Seth Keshodas was also issueless and his younger brother Naomal died when only 25. Naomal left behind two sons, Ramchand (b-1884) and Jairamdas (b-1885). Jethamal brought up his two nephews like sons. Harchandrai had four sons, Atmaram (b. 1916), Surajprakash (b. 1918), Suchanand (b. 1922) and Daulatram (b. 1926).

Srichand had only one son, Hiralal (b. 1905) who later came to be known as Principal Bharvani Hiralal. Odhodas had four sons, Sukhdev (b. 1896), Lachmandas (b. 1927), Ramchand (b. 1914) and Prithviraj (b. 1917).

Naomal's eldest son Ramchand also died young like his father at the age of 24. His brother Jairamdas had six sons, Jauharlal, Mohanlal, Hiralal, Harilal, Kanhialal and Arjunlal.

In 1912, Seth Jairamdas separated from the Naomal family and set up his own business and farming estate. Vishandas died in Hyderabad in 1929. Two of his sons died in his lifetime, Harchandrai in 1928 and Odhodas in 1926. Srichand died in Manjho in 1932 and his only son, Principal Hiralal Bharwani died in Delhi in 1949.

One of the important members of the Vishandas family was Seth Sukhdev who had four sons, Khushiram, Sunderdas, Mahesh and Mohan. The second son of Odhodas, Lachmandas had three sons, Kishenchand, Bhagwan and Ishwar. Ramchand had three sons, Inder, Ajit and Raju. Seth Prithviraj was issueless.

VISHANDAS NEHALCHAND

Seth Vishandas was born in 1900 Bikrami corresponding to AD 1843 in the village Manjho in Kotri tehsil. It was the year when Sindh was annexed by the British, marking the end the Talpur rule. The latter were defeated by the British forces led by Sir Charles Napier. When he was born, Parmahence, his father's guru, predicted a bright future and long life for him. He also predicted that Vishandas would make a name for himself. The guru named him Vishnu on the sixth day of his birth.

Two years later, another son, Lilaram was born. Since Nehalchand's son were born many years after his marriage, they were brought up with great love and affection. The two boys grew up under their father's care. The father's piety left a deep imprint on their minds. Sages and saintly meḥ used to meet every day in "Bilas Bagh" to engage in learned discourse and to listen to high music. All these influenced the two boys in their formative years. Their father taught them Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script and Hindu Sindhi. The two brothers were married in 1859. Vishandas was married to Seth Dunimal Tilokchandani of village Manjhand's daughter, Reejhalbai. Lilaram was married to Nirmalabai who was the daughter of Seth Bojhraj Khealdas. Both Dunimal and and Bojhraj were leading merchants in Manjhand. In

May, 1862, Harchandrai was born to Seth Vishandals.

**RAI BAHADUR SETH VISHANDAS,
SETH NEHALCHAND
(MANJHO-KARACHI)**

VISHANDAS belonged to a Sanwalani family. His great grandfather, Sanwalmal, was a prosperous businessman.

Hence the family name Sanwalani. In 1768, a gang of Baloch marauders ransacked Khudabad and then put it to the torch. Sanawal Mal migrated to Unnarpur.

Sanwalmal had four children, Paro Mal, Lakhimal, Tolamal and Chhatomal. In those days, Unnarpur was a village situated along the river bank. When the river changed course Unnarpur was sub-merged, obliging the Sanawals to move to near by village Manjhu in Tehsil Kotri, the District Karachi where they began to make efforts to expand their business.

Seth Tolamal had two sons, Lakhmichand and Morio Mal. Lakhmichand had a son in turn, Nehal Chand who was born in 1798 who fathered Vishandas and Lila Ram. Vishandas had three sons, Harchand Rai (who became a prominent leader of the All India Congress) Srichand and Odhudas.

Nehalchand was his father's only son. He was married to a prosperous Hyderabad businessman Seth Khushaldas Parumal's daughter. Nehalchand himself was a well-to-do trader. In 1837, he became

a disciple of Satguru Gulabdas and chose to live the rest of days an ascetic.

His first son, Vishandas was born in village Manjho in 1843 after a 45 year wait. He was taught Punjabi and Sindhi at home. In 1859, he was married to Seth Dhanimal Tilokchand's daughter in Manjhand. His first son, Harchandrai, was born in 1862 who rose to become a prominent national worker in Sindh, a Congress leader, a members of the central legislative council and the president of the Karachi municipality. His father Seth Nehalchand who because of his asceticism came to be known as Nehal Lal, died in 1865. Cholera broke out in Manjho in 1900, forcing Vishandas to migrate to Karachi.

Vishandas was an exceptional trader and landlord. He had an extremely generous disposition, was a devoted social worker and had an abiding interest in music, education and literature. Above all, he was an astute politician. His biography, Ratanjot, has been published by his family which is being reproduced in an abridged form here.

He was hardly 19 when, under the influence of his austere father, he was attracted by asceticism. His father's mentor was still alive when this happened. One day, without telling his family, he took a boat and sailed from Kotri to Multan from where he went to the village Chathianwala. Having lived at the seminary of his father's mentor for six-and-a-half months, returned home. He did not become a hermit but retained his interest in devotional music. He had no peer in piety and prayers.

On his return from the Punjab, he went into business. His creed was not to be a slave to money but to be its lord and master. He followed this rule all his life and made a fortune and spent it lavishly. His intelligence and sagacity impressed Makhdum Mian Amin Mohammad so much that he gave him general power of attorney to manage his estate. He ran the estate extremely ably and improved its affairs. However, when the Makhdum became an ascetic and went into seclusion, his other employees did not give Vishandas the respect he deserved. Therefore, he left the estate and resumed his business.

Apart from commerce, Vishandas secured land on contract and soon become the owner of vast tracts. He established a business house in Kharadar in Karachi in 1869 and had a spacious mansion built near the Mereweather Tower. He acquired agricultural land in several places in Sindh and also set up factories for making horse-drawn carriages. He also went into foreign trade. At the time of his death, he left behind 8,000 acres of land.

Generally when people acquire wealth by dint of hard work, they become tight-fisted and give money neither to those in need nor they spend it on themselves. But Vishandas was a man apart. He treated his servants and Haris generously without taking caste or creed into consideration. This was the reason why his employees were always loyal to him. They knew that the Seth spent his money judiciously and well and maintained a meticulous record of income and expenditure. In fact his estate was being run like a estate and he was contributing

to countless charities and on social welfare projects. His employees considered it sinful to cheat on him. However on the rare occasions a servant showed signs of human frailty, he was generously forgiven.

Among his many charitable acts, the following may be recounted:

1. He gave free grain to the unemployed.
2. Free cooked food was distributed in the villages.
3. He would buy government grazing fields and allow villagers to feed their cattle free of charge.
4. He would put the unemployed to dig water channels in order to provide jobs to them.
5. Several free community kitchens were opened by him where the poor ate.
6. He would provide free medical aid to the poor.
7. His charitable work was not confined to Sindh. When in 1897, Sholapore and Ahmad Nagar were hit by famine, he had shops opened there where foodgrain and other items were sold on subsidised rates.

In the last few years of his life, he was afflicted by asthma which obliged him to move to Hyderabad where he established a new locality, Vishan Nagar, where he himself also settled. He had a serai (inn) established for traveller. He organised an annual fare with a free community kitchen. He set up schools, hired the services of teachers and ordered the construction of a hospital.

He did commendable work to combat social evils such as dowry, the sale and purchase of girls and extravagant and unnecessary expenditure on deaths and marriages. He had a book published

which could be called a code of ethics for the Hindus. It was circulated through the panchayats. He called a special panchayat which passed a resolution condemning these evils. He is, therefore, justly regarded as a social reformer.

Vishandas had a catholic taste in music and was himself a good musician. To his musical soirees, noted singers from all over India were invited and applauded for their art. Among these singers were Bindu Khan, Gaman Khan, Piyarey Khan, Mubarak Khan and Sandhu Khan. All performers had to be careful singing before Vishandas because of his deep knowledge of the intricacies of music.

When in Karachi, he would host daily musical sessions in his mansion in Lakhi Street near the Maryweather Tower which had a magnificent hall, named the Vishan Sabha. Similar sessions used to be held in his gardens in Manjho, in Vishan Nagar in Hyderabad and on board his personal large. Outstation invitees were provided with excellent board and lodging supervised personally by the Seth. When in the mood, he would sing himself.

He commissioned several books on sufism which contained the poetic work of prominent sufis. These books were in Urdu, Persian, Sindhi and Seraiki. They were distributed free to the initiated. A translation of the Holy Quran was published and distributed free. Likewise, he had books written on moral and social issues. They were titled Vishan Parkash, Vishan Ganj, Vishan Gayan, Vishan Raag. The Karima was translated from the original Persian into Sindhi at his behest. In this way, he patronised several literary figures.

Vishandas attended the inaugural sessions of the Indian National Congress in Bombay in 1895, in Calcutta in 1906 and in Madras in 1908. He also attended several other congress sessions till 1918. Harchandrai and other members of his family began attending the Congress sessions under his influence.

He was a member of the Karachi district board till the last. He was the president of the Kotri taluka board till his death. He had close links with the British and was given the title of Rai Bahadur not because he was a hanger-on but because he contributed generously to government-sponsored social welfare schemes.

His progeny followed in his footsteps. An account of the life of his son, Harchandrai had been included in Ratanjot. He died during his father's lifetime and I did not get to know him. Therefore, I have not been able to give his life sketch in this book. His grandson, Seth Sukhdev is continuing to hold the torch of public service lit by Vishandas aloft and alight against heavy odds.

He was for some time a member of the Pakistan constituent assembly. Before that he played a significant role in the Congress struggle for independence. This has been chronicled in Ratanjot. He has been president of Sindh Hindu Panchayat. These days he does business in Karachi. I get to meet him quite often. These meetings give great pleasure to me.

I got to know him because his land was continuous to mine but by the time I grew up, the Seth's health had deteriorated greatly and he could not come here too much. I first met him around

1925 as a member of the Karachi district local board. Afterwards I would sail to Kotri to see him. My father had good relations with him and, therefore, he treated me with great love and affection. I did not attend his music sessions. Even so, I had the opportunity to meet this highly gifted elder on several occasions.

He died on January 7, 1929, after a protracted illness. He was 85.

Book: "Janab Gazareem Jin Sein"
(With whom I Lived Life)

G.M. Sayed

THE GURU PARMAHENCE

Parmahence was the guru of Vishandas' father, Nehalchand. Parmahence died in Basant, 1914 Bikrami corresponding to AD 1857. His samadhi was in Nehalchand's garden, three kilometres from Matiari near Teemaivasi. It was called Darbar Parmahence where a fair was held on Holi every year which sages from various places including Bhagat and Gulabdasi used to attend. Vishandas had a two-storey building constructed near the samadhi. Here sessions of devotional music were held by sages and holy men while the top floor was reserved for their lodging.

At the Darbar Sahib, keepers of the place were chosen by turn. In the end, Seth Vishandas appointed Bhagat Preenmal to that position. The Bhagat died in 1944 and was succeeded by his son but he migrated to India in 1947. After that, no one looked after the Darbar Sahib and the samadhi and everything fell into ruin.

SATGURU GULABDAS

Satguru Gulabdas was born in Ratol near Taran Taran in Amritsar district in Vikrami 1780 corresponding to AD 1723 to a prosperous farming family. His father's name was Deva Mira and his mother was Mata Desa. He was no ordinary child and even in infancy he gave enough indication to show that he was destined to do great things. When he was just eleven, he set out to see the world for himself. There was not a place of any importance in India which he did not visit. He saw holy places and met holy men of great piety and wisdom from whom he learnt to his heart's desire.

During this period, he also visited Sindh which was ruled at the time by the Kalhoras. He also met Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai who was in those days engaged in solitary meditation in a forlorn place like Bhit. Shah Latif realised that he had met a complete and enlightened man. The two spent some time together during which there were discourses on matters of spiritual interest.

The Satguru also met Sri Bankhandi in the Sindh river forest near Sukkur. The latter was one of the better savants of his time who had renounced worldly goods and creature comforts.

After 80 years of wandering as a yogi, Satguru Gulabdas, now fully aware of the secrets of matters spiritual, set up camp outside the Chatthianwala village in District Kasur in the Punjab in Vikrami

1871 corresponding to AD 1814. His fame spread far and wide and people began to flock to him to sit at his feet and to drink deep from his font of wisdom. Soon, Chatthianwala took the shape of a royal court. Several houses came up there and a free community kitchen came up where people could eat at all hours. People contributed voluntarily to expand his court of learning and the number of his disciples began to multiply rapidly.

The Satguru was always at peace with himself and would unravel Vedantic secrets to his disciples and devotees. Thus innumerable people who thirsted for spiritual enlightenment would sit at his feet and keep away from evil. The Satguru's darbar last for 60 years until he died on 19 Bhadon, 1931, Vikrami, corresponding to AD 1874. He was then 151 years of age.

The Satguru was succeeded by Hargobind Sahib whom he had brought up and tutored like his own son. He grew up to be a great savant. Hargobind was succeeded by his son, Tegh Bahadur. He in turn was followed by his son Nand Bahadur and he by Jagjit. After the mass migration of 1947, the Chatthianwala darbar was shifted somewhere in Rajasthan.

The Satguru had a hundred Shastras in the shape of a granth which has been placed in the Darbar Sahib. among the more important of these Shastras are Gulabchaman, Updaishbilas, Anbhigaraj, Gulabgita, Jappsahib, Si-harfi, Baramah, etc. Of these only Gulab Chaman was published in the Punjab in the Gurmukhi script of the Punjabi language and in Urdu. This granth was also published in Sindhi. It is full of pearls of

wisdom. The other Shastras are in manuscript form in the shape of one granth. Some of these are in the possession of the Gulabdasis.

Among the Satguru's more prominent followers, the following may be listed:

Sri Parmahence, Sant Tara Singh, Syed Mohammad Shah, Mata Piro, Sant Lilaram, Maharaj Hargobind Saheb, Seth Vishandas and Sant Manjhiram. The Satguru has a large following in the Punjab and Sindh. His devotees call themselves Gulabdasis. In Sindh, the founder of the Premdasi school was Sri Parmahence. Among the noted Premdasis of Sindh were the following:

Seth Nehalchand Lakhmichand, his son Vishandas and his grandsons Harchandrai, Srichand and Odhudas. Bhagat Jetharam and his son Bhagat Ratanchand and his grandson, Sain Lok Sant Das, Bawa Gawal Lal, his disciple Bhagat Jetharam and his grandsons Sadanand, Bawa Moolram, Bhagat Devdas, Maharaj Hemraj, Bawa Shivaram, Hakim Dalorwala, Bawa Dharamdas, Bawa Rinokar, Seth Hasaram, Bhagat Manak Khati, Bhagat Ramdas, his brothers Bansiram, Balchand, Cholhram Hakim, Bhagat Nanakram, Bhagat Jassumal and his son Aalram and Bhagat Atalram Phubeliwala, Bhagat Raisingh, Bhagat Nanakram, Bhagat Motumal, Bhagat Iswardas Tarachand, Chein Bhagat, Khako Mehngghwar, Topan Sonara and others.

Later, these savants had their own disciples. All of them dived deep into the Satguru's sea of knowledge to find pearls of wisdom.

Prominent Sindhi poet Rohal Faqir also spent some time in the Chatthianwala darbar from where

he learnt how to compose Hindi poetry from the Satguru. The Satguru was a Vedantic sage. According to the Vedantic principle, life merges with Brahma in the end. Brahma is the divine reality of which the entire universe is but a reflection. When 'jiu' (temporal life) merges with Brahma, it is like light merging with light. He thinks that life should be spent doing pious deeds because piety alone can rid a person of sin. He who cannot rid himself of temptation cannot attain true education and enlightenment.

Gayan Pud Chunyo Nehain Kuram Kya Nass

*Ghar Ka Bhaya Na Ghat Ka Sawami
Bhajandas*

When a person becomes capable of attaining spiritual wisdom, he is blessed with light. As the Satguru says:

("When the guru is kind to his disciple, he himself gives him the key to knowledge. The Satguru spreads light all over the world like the sun. He teaches his devoted disciple to find his real self. When the Satguru teaches true love to his follower he transports him with joy. Gulabdas says:

"This is the stage where the disciple's soul gets real peace and he can find his real self and he is freed of all doubt and he attains the ability to see every situation and every condition in the same light."

IN THE GULABDAS DARBAR

When Vishandas turned 19 after Harchandrai's birth, there was an inner change in him and he began to turn away from mundane affairs to matters spiritual. His father's influence had a great deal to do with this radical change in the young man.

His father's guru, Permehence, had died in 1857. But Satguru Gulabdas was alive and Vishandas decided to become his disciple. He was barely 19 and was used to a life of luxury. His first child was only a few months old but he was determined to sit at the Satguru's feet. Satguru Gulabdas lived in Kasur in the Punjab, hundreds of miles away from Kotri and travel was difficult in those days but as Shah Latif says:

"Only those whose breasts are aglow with Love think of fording the river

"Those whose hearts are full of yearning for the Beloved, find it easy to cross the river."

In those days, Kotri was a big river port. The railway line ran only from Karachi to Kotri. One had to sail from Kotri to Multan by steamboat. The Indus Valley Company used to run these boats. It had established docks every 16 kilometres for passengers to embark and for the boats to get further fuelwood to keep chugging.

It was early 1863 and Vishandas used to live in his timber factory in Kotri. He took a steamboat for

Multan without seeking permission from his father. He knew the captain of the boat whom he had taken into confidence about his plans. Except for the clothes he was wearing he had nothing. Nehalchand was at the time in Manjho and his wife was with her parents in Majhand. He wrote a letter to his father telling him that he was visiting his mother and would return in a week or so.

Vishandas was so obsessed with his spiritual quest that he lost his appetite but the steamboat captain had made arrangements to feed him on board. After eight days, the boat docked at Sukkur. As chance would have it, Seth Wassanmal boarded the boat to offload goods belonging to him. He was also a disciple of Guru Permehence and a brother-in-faith of Vishandas' father. He was originally from Kandyaro but business considerations had obliged him to move to Sukkur. Bhai Wassanmal recognised Vishandas and took him to his place of business. He gave him new dresses and other things needed by a traveller.

From Sukkur, Vishandas wrote to his father, seeking forgiveness for having left without his permission and asked him to pray for the success of his spiritual mission. The boat steamed off from Sukkur and reached Multan's Sher Shah Bunder in 12 days. Vishandas stayed with Sant Manjhiram in Multan because his colleague Hiranand was due there in a week's time. The latter was an apprentice of Seth Nehalchand's and used to work in his factory in Kotri. Manjhiram had been to Sindh by road a year earlier along with other sages and had the opportunity to strike an acquaintanceship with Vishandas. the two used to

correspond with each other at regular intervals. Manjhiram also decided to accompany Vishandas to the darbar or Satguru Gulabdas. Manjhiram's elder brother Sant Laneedar was already one of the Satguru's disciples.

From Multan, these three pilgrims left for Chatthianwala. Along the way they kept chanting, *Chalo Chalo abb Darshan Karen Satguru Gulabdev Wali ka'* (Let us go, let us go, to pay our respects to Satguru Gulabdev the saint).

Chatthianwala was 320 kilometres away from Multan. The three would travel 32 kilometres a day and beg for food along the way. The tradition in the Punjab was that if anyone knocked at any door and requested for food, he would get it. So they had ample things to eat. At night, they would stay at any public place. They reached Chatthianwala in about 20-21 days.

The Satguru's darbar was near the Chatthianwala village where many of his followers, men of piety, seekers after truth and general guests used to stay. There was a community kitchen which was open round the clock but all work at the darbar had to be done by the Guru's followers themselves.

The guru's disciples received daily lectures and gained spiritual enlightenment which was possible only by devotion and purity of mind and body. Everyone reaps what he sows.

At the darbar, there was no distinction of caste or creed. The guru had some Muslim followers also. Among the guru's chosen disciples were Sant Tara Singh who was a Harijan, Syed Mohammad Shah who was a famous hakim in Lahore's Mochidarwaza and Mata Prio who had also been

born in a Muslim family. All three were great scholars and they themselves would teach the newcomers and would help them in every matter.

Seth Vishandas got busy working for the darbar without regard to his station in life which earned high praise from everybody. He wounded his head carrying bricks so badly that the sore began to smell but he continued regardless. He did not tell anyone of his affliction but one day when he got near the Satguru, he smelt the foul odor. When Vishandas told him what had happened, the Guru who was already impressed by his devotion, showered lavish praise on him.

Vishandas fashioned himself after the guru and wrote the following lines in his praise:

*My days and my nights are for the saint
Living with the beloved has freed me of all fear
and superstition*

*His luminous vision has rid my of all desire
And his thought has freed me of all worry.*

Intelligent in the extreme, Vishandas, became proficient in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi. He also acquired some knowledge of Persian. All this while he continued to grow spiritually and his heart began to sing:

*Neither a Hindu, nor a Turk, nor yet a Pandit or
Qazi'am I*

*Neither a Syed, nor a Muslim nor yet a namazi
am I*

*The truth is that all this is a spell cast by a
magician*

*When Vishandas discovered himself he learned
to be happy in every situation.*

Vishandas was still infatuated with his name. He completed his lessons. At the end there was an examination at which he was asked several questions, the last one being, "Who are you Vishna?"

Aadh Jugat Ki Vishan Hai

Mudh Bhi Wishna Howi

Aant Jagat Ki Vishan Hai

Vishan Bhajh Na Koe

His answers satisfied the Satguru who advised him to go back home and share with others that which he had learnt at the darbar. Thus after spending six months and a half, Vishandas left for home with the blessings of all gurus at the darbar as well as those of his colleagues. He decided that the following principles would constitute his creed.

A TRUE SAVANT

Back home in Manjho, he paid respects to his father. Vishandas, unlike other saintly people, did not believe in living like a recluse. Had he decided to do so, he would have easily found for himself a large following of disciples. He had his own view about hermits. He would say that the true savant was one who was immune to worldly fears, who had found himself, who had found his beloved in the temple of his heart and who made his own living rather than be at the mercy of others. If he, the true savant, had things in excess of his personal requirements, he should give them to the others (in need). Therefore, in order to become a true savant, he surrendered his soul to the Beloved and his body to human beings and got busy with his work.

His philosophy of life is reflected in the following verses (free translation):

Hard work, making a name and a living for oneself,

Recognition of the (needs of) orphans and the poor,

Contacts with the Brahmins and savants

Saving time for meeting one's needs

To live like this to achieve freedom from pain

All these, Vishandas, represent the ways of the true savant.

Precept is one thing, practice another. Vishandas gave practical shape to his precepts. He

would always say that one should not be a slave to wealth but its master and use it to good purpose:

Everyone yearns for wealth but I never did so

It was all right if it came but bothered not if it didn't

I work to make money, no doubt

If it came my way, it made me happy; if it went away, it made me happy even then

Wealth is prayer for some, a daughter for some, a sister for some

For me it is my wife and I am its monarch.

NATIONAL AWARENESS

Vishandas was a man with an independent bent of mind through and through. He had abandoned considerations of caste and creed when still a young boy and benefited greatly from the Vedantic teachings of Satguru Gulabdas. It was the Satguru's influence which made him liberal of mind and strong of will.

In his day, traders and friends and relative put their children to work quite early but Vishandas believed in educating them. He made his sons seek higher education. Harchandrai had a law degree, Srichand was a graduate but Odhudas had to cut short his academic career in class IV because of optical problems. He believed that only through education could the nation make moral and material progress and rid itself of superstition and other reprehensible practices and become emancipated. Education would enable the people to look at life in a new light and make them interested in nation-building activities.

The spread of English education enabled young people to acquaint themselves with British history and literature. The achievements and bravery of the British and the tremendous sacrifices made by them in the national cause left a deep impact on young Indians and instilled in them the spirit of patriotism and a desire for national uplift.

Social welfare organisations began to sprout in various part of India. In Sindh, the Sindh Sabha came up, headed by Diwan Dayaram Jethmal who was a prominent lawyer. His work for social emancipation is legend. He was the founder of the first college in the province. It was called the Sindh College which came later to be known as the Dayaram Jethmal or DJ College.

The idea then gained ground that instead of regional organisations, a national institution comprising prominent leaders from all over India should be formed. This led to the creation of the Indian National Congress whose founding president was an Englishman, Mr Hume. The first meeting of the Congress was held in Bombay in 1885. It was attended by 72 delegates from all over India. The Sindh Sabha was represented by Diwan Dayaram Jethmal and Diwan Adharam Moolchand. Seth Vishandas also attended the meeting which showed his concerns for matters of national import. Vishandas was quite well known in Bombay where he had a wide circle of friends. His son, Harchandrai was at the time studying law there and he had an opportunity to meet several people for an exchange of views.

Seth Vishandas also attended the second and third annual meetings of the Congress held in Calcutta and Madras despite his multifarious business engagements. The proceedings of the Madras meetings were conducted in English. Therefore, he sent Harchandrai to attend the fourth meeting of the congress in Allahbad in 1888 where he made a speech. He attended congress meetings till 1918 and was a leader of the party in Sindh.

Harchandrai remained in Bombay for seven years where he was deeply influenced by the progressive ideas which were then in the air and which lit in his heart the flame of nationalism. Encouraged by his father, he decided to devote his life to national reconstruction. It was his father's influence which made Harchandrai the man he was. In fact, Vishandas had donated his son to the national cause.

LOVE OF LITERATURE

Music, learning how to sing and dance and poetry are delicately beautiful disciplines in basic education. He who is interested in these is also interested in knowledge in its infinite variety. Vishandas was way ahead of others in his devotion to all these arts. He wanted that the common people should develop an interest in reading.

He took several steps to promote the reading habit in the people. He set up a litho press in Karachi in 1896 where he got the following books published for free distribution:

1. The Holy Quran along with its translation in Urdu. It was given free on request to every Muslim sailing from Karachi to perform Haj.
2. *Vishan Wahnvarik Updesh*. It was written by the Seth himself on the Sindhi Hindu society towards the end of the nineteenth century. He dealt at length with undesirable traditions and made a plea to the Hindus to give them up. He also advocated that these practices be reformed in line with the requirements of a changing world. Especially mentioned are the rituals observed on life and death. He asked his readers not to indulge in needless conspicuous consumption which was always counter-productive in the end. The 243-page book was written in Sindhi and was extremely tastefully

printed by his litho press in 1897. It was distributed free of cost.

3. *Vishan Prakash*: This 168-page had two sections. It was written by Pandit Diwanchand of Molot in Punjab was used two pen names, 'Diwana' and 'Danish'. It was also published in 1897. This saintly person had gained spiritual awareness at the feet of Seth Vishandas.

The book contains ghazals and panegyrics in noble language. The achievements of Vishandas have been recounted in Urdu and Persian ghazals.

4. *Vishan Ganj*: Published in 1900, this book has four sections. It was written by Sain Ghani. The first part is on medicine and contains several prescriptions for keeping good health. In addition it has a glossary of difficult Urdu and Sindhi words together with their meanings.

The second part is titled *Vishan Sakha*. It chronicles the plague epidemics in Karachi and Kotri, *Vishan Wahnvar*, an account of the public gathering in Aderolal and a list of the generous social service undertaken by the Seth. The third part is titled *Vishan Gayan* which contains the sufistic directives given by Vishandas from time to time. It also contains Sain Ghani's Persian poetry and selections of Urdu and Persian verses written by poets of learning, knowledge, piety and compassion.

The fourth section is called *Vishan Raag*. It contains Sain Ghani's poetry, an account of classical music and bhajans (Hindu psalms). It has a selection of important poets of India and a chapter on social and spiritual conduct based on

the directions and advice given to Sain Ghani by Seth Vishandas. These directions have been presented in ghazal form. In short, this 800-page book is a wonderfully invaluable anthology of Urdu literature.

5. *Kariman*: This famous book in Persian was translated into Sindhi by the manager of the Seth's Kotri property, Seth Jashanmal. The original Persian text has also been included. The book was distributed free of cost.
6. *Masnavi*: This book has been written by Sain Ghani and deals with Islam and Hidnuism. Vishandas had it published at his own expense. But it was distributed free of cost.

It can be seen from the above account that the Seth's generosity was not limited to providing material help to the needy. He also served the cause of literature equally magnanimously. He distributed several books free of cost among those interested in literature and learning so that they could benefit from his invaluable treasure trove. Literature flourishes when it finds a patron who understands its importance. It was the Seth's magnanimity which made the publication of several rare books possible.

A GREAT CONNOISSEUR

Under the influence of his father, Vishandas developed a keen interest in music from early childhood. Savants and derveshes from all over India used to congregate at Bilas Bagh where devotional music was sung. There used to be scores of singers and musicians. His constant contact with prominent singers and teachers of music enabled Vishandas to acquire a deep knowledge of the intricacies and nuances of various ragas.

Expert singers and poets also used to attend the darbar of Satguru Shri Gulabdas where sessions of classical and devotional music were held regularly. There was much dancing also. Famous dancing girls would give of their best and lend lustre to their art. Therefore, together with music, Vishandas also acquired great proficiency in the art of dancing. This interest in singing and dancing Vishandas retained all his life. He promoted these arts in Sindh and several noted musicians were always in his pay.

On his return from the darbar of Satguru Gulabdas, Vishandas brought a young singer, Hadoo Khan, from the Punjab. The latter was in constant attendance at the darbar and was, therefore, very much under the Satguru's philosophy. He was an expert singer who also played the sitar quite well. His father's name was

Ahmad Khan who belonged the Fatehgarh, a small town near Amritsar.

Hadoo Khan spent all his life with Vishandas. A son was born to him in Manjho whom he named Saindho Khan. He was also brought up by Vishandas and in time became a good poet, singer and sitar player. He died at Makhdum Sahib of Hala's place ten years ago.

Vishandas used to hold music sessions every day no matter where he was at a given moment in time. Permanent arrangements had been made for singing and dancing at the eleven places where he had his trading establishments. At each place there used to be a hall named Vishan Sabha or Raag Mehfil. There were living quarters for vocatists, instrumentalists and dances. Each one was called 'Hadoo Khan Ki Marri'. Wherever he went, these people accompanied him together with other workers.

Every night there would be singing and dancing in Vishan Sabha whose account is aptly given in the following kafi in raag Sarang by Sarichand

Vishnu Ki Darbar Ka Beean Suno Tu

Taaj Faqiri Shan Ameri

Gaani Bujani Walee Yahan Heen

Tublchi, Hur Taan Ka Awaz Suno Tu

In the Lakhmidas Street near the Mereweather Tower in Karachi, Vishandas had a magnificent hall built on the ground floor of his house. Called the Vishan Sabha, the hall was extremely well appointed and was famous for its glasswork, its statuettes and its decor. The floor was carpeted for the performers while there were chairs for the

audience. At the beginning of every session, the poet of the Vishan Sabha would recite some verses from *Vishan Ganj* or fresh verses of his own. If a poet was invited, he too would recite his poetry and win applause from the guests. Selections from important poets were also recited.

After the poetry recital was over, music would begin and various singers would regale the listeners. In the end would begin dancing and celebrated nautch girls would perform. Each one of these dancers were keen to do well because a performance at Vishan Sabha was a passport to sure success.

Twice a week, the doors of Vishan Sabha were thrown open to everyone high and low. These used to be the most well-attended functions where music-lovers were offered delightful fare. Likewise, to the music sessions at each of the trading centres belonging to Vishandas, entry was free for everyone. Such sessions were held under a mango tree in Manjho and under a shelter made of date palm leaves in Manjho.

On the festival of Holi, a huge annual fair was held in Teemaiwasi (near Matiari) where the samadhis (cremation platforms) of Guru Parmahence and Seth Nehalchand are located. A magnificent session of music used to be the grand finale of the fair.

Both Hindu and Muslim poets used to attend the Vishan Sabha functions. Poetry was mostly in Urdu but sometimes poems in Hindi would also be recited. The leading poet at the Vishan Sabha was Mohammad Abdul Ghani, whose nom de plume was Sain Abdul Ghani by which he was popularly

known. Well versed in Urdu, Persian and Arabic, the Sain was of a sufistic bent of mind.

A plague epidemic devastated Karachi in 1897 in which Sain Abdul Ghani was also infected by the dreadful disease. He was brought back to health at the Seth Vishandas Hospital after which he made it a point to call on the Seth whenever he could. In his company, Sain Abdul Ghani learnt to mix the austerity of his Sufism with the sweetness of the Seth's Vedantic thought. The Sain wrote many books in Urdu, notable among them being *Vishan Ganj* and *Masnavi Alam Faiz*. Vishandas had them published at his own expense and distributed them free of cost among the devotees of literature. The Sain's anniversary is observed at his mausoleum in Dhobi Ghat Karachi every year. Some of his panegyrics for Seth Vishandas are being reproduced below:

*Sri Vishan Ki Janum Se Rut Aie Jugh
Meen Nai
Nehal Ghar Mein Chandur Maan Nikseea
Reen Andhari*

*Tu Aee Vishanlal Hai Perthipal
Sut Dein Dayal Hai Shaad Haal
Toone Jug Thie Naal Keesi Keesi Gunn Keay*

The other noted poet at Vishan Sabha was Pandit Diwanchand. he used two noms des plumes, Diwana and Danish. He wrote *Vishan Prakash*, which is a collection of Urdu, Persian and Punjabi verse. One of his ghazals is being reproduced here:

Kisse Ne Bheed Na Vishnu Ka Paya

Ye Kul Jugh Hai Jo Sut Jugh Kar Dikhaya

In the Raaj Mehfil, a play, *Vishan Sabha* was often read (not performed). It was written by Syed Murad (nom de plume: Mir Soz) and published in 1894. It was written in Urdu on the *Inder Sabha* pattern. Seth Jashanmal used to read it much to the delight of the audiences. Seth Jashanmal was quite adept at Urdu and Persian. He translated *Karimaan* from the original Persian into Sindhi.

Master Hotchand Tekwani was an excellent poet in Sindhi. He used to recited verses from *Vishan Ganj* in Vishan Sabha. He originally belonged to Manjho but moved to Karachi where he became the headmaster of a Sindhi school. Apart from Sindhi, he was quite at home in Urdu, Hindi Persian and Punjabi. He was a man of great learning who took keen interest in nation-building activities.

In the Hindu society of those days, one of the undesirable practices was to make women wear crowns. Vishandas had to work hard for several years before this entirely unacceptable practice came to an end. Master Hoichand began his campaign against this practice from his own home and also wrote a Kafi in this regard.

Apart from Hadoo Khan and his son Saindho Khan, another noted singer was Gaman Khan who was the son of Shadi Khan who belonged to Fatehgarh. Gaman's son, Mubarak Khan, was also among the leading singers of his time who spent long years in the employ of Seth Vishandas. Later, he took up residence in Shikarpur from where he moved to Karachi. His brother and son turned out to be singers of considerable merit.

The third singer of importance was Mira Bux Aabro Khan from Amritsar. His son Payara Khan and grandson Ummeed Ali Khan also turned out to be good singers. Both were born in Vishan Nagar where they grew up to become part of the company of singers who used to perform at Vishan Sabha for years before migrating to Lahore.

Among the noted dancing girls who used to perform at Vishan Sabha were Jhandi of Karachi, Moti Jan and Hayatan of Hyderabad and Allah Jiwai and Allah Rakkhi from Lahore. Apart from dancing, they had complete command over classical music.

Vishandas acquired all-India fame for his devotion to music and dancing. That is why all important singers or dancing girls used to consider it as a matter of great honour to perform at Vishan Sabha whenever they visited Karachi. An accomplished artiste considers it part of his training to perform before someone who has complete mastery over his or her specialisation.

The extent to which Vishandas had become an all-India name so far as music and dancing were concerned can be gauged from the following story:

There used to be a man who was employed by Vishandas in one of his factories. He was crazy about music but was not willing to pay for a performance. Eventually, he thought of a clever way of having free access to entertainment. He would go to prominent dancers and singer in every city he visited, identify himself and tell them that Seth Vishandas was in town and he was scouting for talent. It was his duty to assess the worth of all artistes before they could perform for that great

connoisseur of music. He would be warmly received because the very name Vishandas was the key to every door behind which a singer or a dancer lived. Thus did he enjoy himself in Calcutta and Lahore and every other city in between.

There is another story. Once Gohar Jahan, the famous dancer, came to perform at a theatre in Karachi. Vishandas went to watch her at the insistence of his friends. During her performance, Gohar Jahan took a false step which went unnoticed by everyone in the audience except Vishandas. He motioned her to stop dancing much to the surprise of the audience. There was pin-drop silence in the hall. To stop a dancer of Gohar Jahan's repute in her tracks was no laughing matter. But the man who had done so was Vishandas, the great critic and connoisseur. When he told her where she had gone wrong, Gohar Jahan accepted her error and said that her teacher had told her that if there was anyone in Sindh who knew what dancing was all about, it was Vishandas.

Music was an affair of the heart with Vishandas. He had a 100-foot long barge in which he would sail in the river Indus during the summer months. The barge had living accommodation for Vishandas and his team of artistes and a whole complement of servants. There was room also for a buggy and a cow. This could be called the floating Vishan Sabha and music ruled the waves.

After 1909, Vishandas settled in Hyderabad. From 1913 onward he would organise a big musical fair every year on Asarh 28-30. Famous singers were invited to the fair to give an exhibition of

their art. Savants and the derveshes of Sindh were also invited to the three-day show. Once the immortal martyr of Sindh, Bhagat Kunwar Ram also attended and regaled the vast audience with his melodious voice.

It can thus be seen how Vishandas popularised music in Sindh and gave an opportunity to ordinary people to acquaint themselves with it and then enjoy it. Music is food for the soul. Music can only be promoted by those who are themselves interested in it and are men of high taste.

A GENEROUS MAN

Vishandas belonged to a long line of traders and his family had been known as Seths for generations. But Vishandas outdid all his predecessors and made a great name for himself. All this was because of the teachings of Satguru Gulabdas which transformed him. Traditionally wealth turns a man into a selfish megalomaniac and he spurns all decent and delicate human values. Money is an addiction and only the very great can overcome it. Vishandas was one such great man. He owned money; money did not own him and this made him as generous as he was rich. A man of indomitable will, his heart was full of compassion for the dispossessed. As Shah Latif has said:

*Let your heart be like a tree
If you thrash a tree, it sheds fruit or flowers
If you axe a tree, it does not cry out in pain
Even if someone hacks it into pieces, a tree bears
him no malice
A tree gives light to those who burn it
Shah Latif says O my mates, only such people
find the Beloved (who are like trees).*

Vishandas was above considerations of caste or creed. He lent a helping hand to anyone who sought it. He was for ever ready to serve the people. Once there was a terrible drought in Kohistan and the people living there began to find it difficult to make

ends meet. This moved Vishandas to the core. Promptly he ordered that fair price grain shops be opened in Manjho and Kotri. He was a big timber contractor and he allowed the poor to sell wood to make a living and he permitted them to graze their cattle on his land. Thus did he help the Kohistanis in their hour of need.

In Tharparkar, too, drought used to create near-famine conditions. Vishandas would open fair price shops in the area and distribute foodgrain to the poor free of charge.

In 1897, a plague epidemic hit Karachi causing great panic among the people. Adversity made people selfish and friends and relatives began to abandon each other. No-one cared for anyone else. It was each one for himself. Vishandas once again rose to the occasion. There was a civil hospital but its staff was callous. Therefore, people fought shy of seeking treatment there. Realising this, Vishandas established a hospital at his own expense and put it under Dr. Nazrat's charge. He was a prominent physician of his time. The hospital was situated in the Bhimpura Quarters near the Bara Akhara. It had 75 beds and a full complement of nurses and paramedical staff. Food and medicines were available in ample measure and so were love and affection. Everyone was given the best treatment without regard to his caste or creed. The hospital was open to everyone and the patients were looked after day and night by the Seth's son, Harchandrai, and nephew, Seth Keshedas. By the Grace of God many people afflicted by plague were cured.

Speaking at a function at the death anniversary of Seth Harchandrai, Maharaj Rewachand

Ratanchand, former chief officer of the Karachi municipality, gave the following account of the hospital:

"During the 1897 plague epidemic, two members of my family died. I myself contracted the disease and was taken to the Vishandas Hospital. Everyone, be friend or relative, was afraid of getting close to the plague patient for fear of contracting the disease himself. But Seth Harchandrai would look after all patients morning and evening. One day, Harchandrai came to me and said, "Riwachand, let me know if there's anything I can do for you." These loving words gave me new strength and I began to recover. I was a small functionary at the municipality while Seth Harchandrai was a prominent lawyer and a municipal councillor. In Karachi Saddar, there used to live a great scholar of Urdu, Persian and Arabic, Hakim Abdul Ghani. He was of a sufistic bent of mind and also a poet with Ghani as his nom de plume. He also fell ill with plague and was admitted to the Vishandas Hospital where he recovered and from then on, become one of the followers of Seth Vishandas. He wrote the following panegyric for Seth Vishandas:

*Jis Dum Vishano Ke Faiz Ka Darya Hawa
Rawan*

*Jungal Khardar Bhi Chaman Gul Fashan
Hawa*

*Sain Ghani Budd Warah Kul Jag Ki Beech
Vishnu Kee Misal Koe Na Fayaz Jan Hawa*

During the plague, there was great confusion in Karachi. Many people, including shopkeepers fled the city and prices began to rocket sky-high.

Essential items of daily use were hard to come by. In these trying circumstances, Seth Vishandas had his own retail shops opened in Jhona Market, Lee Market, Kharadar, Ranchore Line, Gari Khata, Saddar and Kemari where fuelwood and other necessities of life were sold. Bakeries had closed down and the supply of other eatables had come down to a trickle. Vishandas set up free community kitchens at several places where people could get two square meals a day.

The plague of 1898 was even deadlier than the one a year before. Vishandas reopened his plague hospital and served the people to the best of his ability. His selfless service to the people of Karachi in 1897-8 showed what a great man he was and what a noble soul he had.

His social services were reported by the Press every day and several poets paid tributes to his greatness in Urdu and Sindhi. The following verses were written by the Acting Headmaster of the Sindh Madressah-tul-Islam, Ahmad Khan Naurangzada:

*May Seth Vishandas always be happy
May Seth Vishandas be always free of sorrow
He is the friend of the poor in distress
His generosity is known to all
Ahmad Khan prays to God every moment
May Seth Vishandas always continue to shelter
us.*

In 1898, Kotri was also hit by plague. There, too, Vishandas set up a hospital and served the people as he had served the people of Karachi. He won the hearts of the people of Kotri. In 1899, a citizens meeting was held to pay tributes to Seth

Vishandas where it was said that the manner in which he had served the people of Kotri, it might not have been possible for a father to help his son. No praise could be too high for his generosity. It was a time when even relatives were abandoning their own kith and kin but Vishandas served the poor in distress and the plague patients at a difficult time. All this was as clear as broad daylight.

It was also noted at the meeting that but for the help so generously offered so freely by Vishandas, the people of Kotri might have suffered even more grievously. But God took mercy on the people of Kotri and sent a great man like Vishandas to help them in their hour of need. The meeting further noted that in an age when no-one helped anyone in need, Vishandas suspended his business activities and devoted himself to serving the people at great personal cost. No words are adequate enough to acknowledge his services.

In 1897, in Bombay Presidency, there was famine in Ahmadnagar and Sholapur and foodgrain disappeared. As a result, shopkeepers resorted to indiscriminate blackmarketing. Stories of the Seth's philonthropy had reached these cities. A request was made to him for help. Vishandas lost no time in sending foodgrain and his emissaries to the two cities. Fair price shops were opened but the destitute were given grain free of cost. For these meritorious service, W T Morrison, then collector of Sholapur wrote a letter to Vishandas on November 23. It reads:

"Fair price grain shops were opened on your behalf in famine-hit Sholapur from September 15.

This great gesture by you is worthy of all praise as indeed is your spirit of self-sacrifice.

"Grain prices fell because of your gesture. Had prices not fallen, the poor would have been hard put to it to survive and anything might have happened. Thank you for coming to our help in extremely trying circumstances."

The Ahmadnagar municipal report for 1897-98 records the Seth's munificence and notes how, at the request of Mr. Eduljee Rustamjee, then the vice-president of the municipality, Vishandas sent tons of grain to the city and sold it to the people at subsidised rates at great personal loss. The report acknowledges the services rendered to the people of Ahmadnagar by Vishandas and pays glowing tributes to him.

From 1909 onward, Vishandas began spending most of his time in Hyderabad where his doors were always open to the needy who never came out empty-handed. In 1914, Hyderabad was hit by plague. The well-to-do fled but the poor could not afford to do so. Vishandas opened up Vishannagar for them and several families found refuge there. For the others, community houses were provided. Hospitals were opened in Vishan Nagar where sessions of devotional and secular music continued to give solace to tormented souls. Vishandas took other steps to promote public health and happiness. A permanent fair price shop and a serai (inn) were also established in Vishan Nagar.

In 1919, he established a free primary school and a free hospital. Both were inaugurated on April 10 by the then Commissioner of Hyderabad, W H Lucas. A big meeting was held on the occasion

which was attended heads of the Hyderabad panchayats the Muslim and Hindu elites.

In his opening remarks, the commissioner said:

"I congratulate Rai Bahadur Vishandas because despite the fact that he is 73 now, he is as busy with social and philanthropic work as he was when I first met him 25 years ago. His magnanimity and his commitment to social welfare are gifts bestowed on him by nature at birth.

"In the end, I thank Rai Bahadur Seth Vishandas for the services he has rendered to the community. The best way to pay tribute to his many acts of generosity is to propagate them in such a manner that others can learn a lesson from his life and work.

"During World War II when everyone was hoarding money, Vishandas was spending it lavishly on social welfare. There was only one Seth in Sindh whose was a household name for his magnanimity. He did charitable work without being asked by anyone to do so. Other moneyed people of Sindh should emulate him. It should be seen that he began his social service work when he was 20 and continued to do so till he was 85. What he did in these 65 years was beyond all expectations and beggars description. Despite his business and farming engagements, he took time out to serve suffering humanity in a manner which should be a beacon light for others. Indeed, he is peerless."

The way he spent money in difficult times was indeed marvellous. His philosophy on wealth is explained in the following lines written by him:

*If it (money) comes, spend it; don't bother if it
doesn't*

*Wealth is worship for some, daughter for some
and sister for some*

For me, it is my consort and I am its monarch.

A REGAL ASCETIC

Seth Vishandas had no peer in generosity and in social welfare work. He had a generous heart and he could not bear to see anyone in distress. He would assist everyone in trouble without bothering about the supplicant's creed or ethnic origin.

When a killer plague epidemic hit Sindh, some people abandoned human values and they became so selfish that nothing mattered for them except their own lives. They didn't share the sorrows of other. On the contrary, they refused to acknowledge even the existence of the luckless who were afflicted by the disease. But Vishandas, imbued with the spirit of public service and great personal courage, launched a crusade against ill-health and had a hospital built at his own expense where experienced doctors were appointed. The hospital was open to everyone without distinction and treatment was free. He would himself visit the place and look after the patients.

Both during the plague and World War-I articles of daily use became not only scarce but also expensive and shopkeepers indulged in profiteering. Seth Vishandas opened fair price shops at several places. A free community kitchen was always available for the destitute. Vishandas considered it his duty to always help the poor during periods of scarcity and in famine-like conditions. Indeed, when reads about his charitable

work, one can only say that he was a man with saintly qualities. Some people used to say that Vishandas had a touchstone or the alchemy through which he could turn base metals into gold to spend on social welfare to any extent he liked.

The Seth continued in his generous ways for 25 years and his sons began to fear that he might jeopardise their future if he continued with his philanthropy. Things reached such a pass that Vishandas had to divide his property among his sons and leave them to live alone.

This happened in 1921 when Vishandas was 70. It was an age when such separation from one's near and dear ones could break a man's heart. But he was a man apart. For him the division of property and separation from his sons brought great peace. It was all the doing of Satguru whose dictum was

*Preet Ki Sureet Shush Aap Hi Dikhai Gur
Kert Hi Nehal, Pher Dhurshat Meen Leeaiki
Kehi He, Gulabdas Najanand Bhi Jas
Hur Hal Hog Kuri, Shuka Authai Ki*

Seth Vishandas gave his real estate in Karachi and 6,000 acres of agricultural land to his sons but kept the factories in Nawabshah, the commercial property in Kotri and the land in Manjho to himself together with their assets, liabilities and management, all at the age of 70. Not only that. He expanded his business considerably within three years. He continued to do charitable work as before. Apart from his social welfare activities, he gave poor Hindus and Muslims monetary help every month until the last.

He was in perfect health to the last and his faculties of sight and hearing were perfect. As

always, he was busy doing things. Early in the morning he would do paper work with the help of his munshi (accountant). On January 7, 1929, when the munshi turned up early in the morning, Vishandas told him that he was not inclined to work and wanted to rest some more. Then he went away to his bedroom. Much time passed and the sun began to rise but the Seth remained in bed. It was unusual for him to stay in bed for so long. Attempts were made to wake him up but the Seth had gone to eternal sleep.

The news of his passing spread like a prairie fire in Hyderabad and Kotri. All business came to a standstill and tens of thousands of people gathered outside his house in Vishannagar in Hyderabad. His family was told of what had happened on telephone.

His body was taken for cremation in a sitting position with mourners chanting Vishan Autar Ki Jai (Long Live Saint Vishan) as the funeral procession wended its way through Shahi Bazar in Hyderabad to the Shamshan Bhoomi (place for cremation) where his mortal remains were consigned to the flames. Thus did this regal ascetic leave this world on January 7, 1929, corresponding to 25 Nahri Sast, 1975 Vikrami. Well and truly can the people of Sindh be proud of the life and work of a great son of the soil.

SOCIAL REFORMER

It is difficult for a man, especially if he is a landlord, contractor and trader, to take time out for social work which is a difficult thing to do at all times. But Vishandas did it and did it exceptionally well. Social reform means an inevitable clash with the status quo. All change for the better is resented and resisted. The moneyed classes indulge in conspicuous consumption and flaust their wealth with great pride. The lesser endowed ape them with disastrous consequences. Vishandas was a prominent man of his time and was greatly popular in all classes for his generosity.

The advent of the British Raj heralded social change in the sub-continent and Sindh, too, could not remain unaffected. The Hindus of Sindh who were traders and farmers, began seeking government jobs. But some people got into trouble because of social wrongdoing. Vishandas realised this and took it upon himself to bring about social change by launching a campaign against outmoded customs and traditions. In 1897, he wrote a book, *Vishan Vanhwarik Updesh*. This 243-page book was published in lithotype in golden ink. Published at the Seth's own expense, it was distributed free of cost among the panchayats. It throws light on Hindu society as it was towards the end of the 19th century. It was badly needed to bring about a social change. The following excerpts from the foreword of

the book throw light on the Seth's social philosophy:

"Money is essential for procuring food and shelter and for occasions of happiness and sorrow, for maintaining family honour, for entertaining guests and for business. It should not be spent on anything else. The Shastras lay down clear-cut rules on how to spend money.

"Unfortunately, several of our Hindu brethren flout the Shastras and spend far in excesses of their capacity and end up without the means to meet daily needs. What is debt? It is explained by the following verse:

"Some people spend their lives repaying old debts.

"Others take recourse to questionable means to avoid falling in debt and spend their lives in violation of the tenets of their faith.

"When we know that philandering destroys a man, we should abandon customs and traditions which require extravagant expenditure. If we do so, social improvement will be possible within a short period of time.

"The merchants who think that there is no need for them to give up their extravagant ways should consider the following points:

"1. High station in life and wealth are not for ever.

"2. There are several examples in history which show that a pauper today is a prince tomorrow and a prince today is a pauper tomorrow.

"3. If we know of the above examples, is it prudent to spend (lavishly) on marriages and deaths with borrowed money?

"4. Is it good or is it bad to seek credit by mortgaging property?

"There are other customs, practices and traditions which are outside the four walls of social, moral and religious propriety. These practices have been discussed in this book. It is to be hoped that readers will try to understand the importance of social change and act upon the advice offered."

The reason for the free distribution *Vishan Vahinwarik* was to make people think about social problems and revise their views on current practices. The book had considerable impact and visible signs of change began to appear on the social horizon.

Vishandas made an extensive tour of Sindh to propagate his social philosophy. Among the places he visited were on the Kotri to Laki, Hyderabad to Mirpurkhas, Hyderabad to Shehdadpur routes. He also visited Kundyaro, Moro and Naushehro Feroz. He met panchayat leaders and other people and discussed with them his programme for social reform. His efforts bore fruit and a conference was held in Aderolal in 1898 to discuss their reforms.

Aderolal was chosen because a huge mela (fair) was held there every year and people came to join it from every nook and corner of Sindh. The conference on social change was attended by the heads of many panchayats and other delegates in large numbers.

After the conference, the panchayats met separately and several decisions were taken to implement the resolutions passed by the conference. As a result of the Aderolal conference, many Hindu social customs and traditions began

slowly to disappear. Nevertheless, Vishandas thought it expedient to hold another conference because more social reforms were needed. This was held in Talao Kangankhadi in 1905. It was situated to the east of Hyderabad and to the west of Phuleli. The most was held under the auspices of Seth Vishandad. The heads and delegates of several panchayats attended it. It began on January 21 and ended on the 26th. At night musical sessions were held for the guests.

The social reforms proposed by the conference together with the practical measures to implement them were published in book form by Vishandas and distributed free of cost.

After the end of the conference, the following tributes were paid to Seth Vishandas on behalf of the panchayat heads and delegates and all other participants:

"We are grateful to Seth Vishandas for having spearheaded the movement for change and for having saved us from social decline otherwise, decadent practices would have ruined us. You have suffered much during the past eight or nine years to put us on the right path. God has rewarded you amply for your efforts.

"We are grateful to you also for having spared neither effort nor money in organising these conferences.

In reply, Vishandas said:

"I am grateful to all panchayat heads and delegates for having attended the conference despite great pressure on their time and for having lent me a helping hand in my efforts at social reform. Most of you, gentlemen, are prosperous. It

doesn't matter whether you spend your money rightly or wrongly. But hundreds of thousands of people with modest means follow in your footsteps and spend lavishly on borrowed money on questionable social customs and traditions, saying they are second to none. You came here for their betterment and you are leaving after having done so. God will reward you for this.

"I am not worthy of the honour you have conferred on me. As I wrote in my letters to you, I am Vishan's *das* and *dās* means a slave while you weremade in Vishan's image. Therefore, I think that I am your slave also. I will feel worthy of the honour you have bestowed on me only when you implement the resolutions for social reform.

"I hope you will work for the introduction of further social reforms with the same zeal with which you have attended this conference."

The third conference on social reform was held under the auspices of Seth Vishandas in Hyderabad in 1916. His efforts bore fruit and his book *Vishan Vahinwarik* proved a catalyst for far-reaching social changes which sowed innumerable families from disaster and found prosperity and happiness.

AN HONEST MANAGER

Vishandas was a well-known man of high moral character. Makhdum Amin Mohammad of Hala was a minor. His mother offered Vishandas the managership of the family land and other property. He accepted the offer and within a short period of time, effected great improvements which resulted in a considerable increase in the Makhdum family's income. In recognition of his services Makhdum Amin's mother gifted Vishandas a precious sword which had a bejewelled scabbard. This aroused great jealousy in the family's other retainers who decided to murder Vishandas who, however, was providentially saved. Nevertheless, he decided to leave his job at Hala and set up his own business.

A TRADER

He worked on farms on lease and became a timber contractor. By dint of hard work, he became a prosperous trader and landlord. His generosity knew no bounds and he spent lavishly on projects of public weal.

In 1869, he set up a trading house in Karachi near the Kharadar police station. Here he did wholesale business in foodgrains, timber and coal. These commodities were procured from the interior of Sindh. Slowly, other landlords began selling their foodgrain and other commodities through Vishandas. This made him a prominent commission agent. In 1896, he built a magnificent mansion near the Govinddas market in Lakhmi Street close to the Mereweather Tower. The Kharadar business centre was transferred to the new mansion. The grain godowns were shifted to a serai (inn) where he later built the Sindh Madressah.

Vishandash also had a fleet of steamboats which shipped cargo to and from Iran, Arabia, Ketī Bunder, Kutch, Kathiawar, Bombay and Malabar. In 1906, he built an imposing trading centre near the Mandawala building on Bunder Road. The foodgrain business was on the upswing in those days. Since the grain market was in New Chali, Vishandas transferred his foodgrain business to the new building. Business in timber, coal and shipping

continued to be conducted from the Lakhmi Street trading centre.

His family continued to live in Manjho but after the cholera epidemic in 1900, it shifted permanently to Karachi. Vishandas was asthmatic and the humid climate in Karachi was not good for him. Therefore, he himself lived mostly in Manjho and Kotri.

In Kotri, Seth Vishandas had a big factory and a business centre. In those days, Kotri was an important railway station served by a large number of employees. In addition, Kotri was also a prosperous river port with hundreds of passenger and cargo boats plying to and from Sukkur and Keti Bunder. This port or bunder was used by Vishandas for his coal and timber trade. These two goods were brought to Kotri by river and then transported to Karachi by rail.

Vishandas had built a cotton ginning factory near Manjho in 1884 which was destroyed by devastating rain in July 1908. This was a great loss to Vishandas. Together with the factory, invaluable documents were swept away and the whole of Manjho was submerged in rain water. Disregarding his personal losses, however, Vishandas ordered his men to rescue the marooned people and divert the flow of water which was hampering traffic and endangering human life. The expenses required for this rescue operation were borne by the Seth himself.

After the 1908 deluge, Vishandas decided to move his business to Karachi but because of asthma, decided live in Hyderabad which was relatively less humid. The same year, he bought a

garden (survey no. 81) situated between Hyderabad and Phuleli and named it Vishan Nagar. In 1909, he established a cotton pressing and ginning factory, bungalow for himself and quarters for his retainers. The factory was inaugurated by the then collector of Hyderabad Mr. Cell who also approved the name Vishan Nagar. The new locality began to grow gradually until it became a big centre for social welfare. Later, he established a rice husking mill in Badah and cotton ginning factory in Nawab Shah. A smaller rice husking and polishing unit was established by the Seth in his birthplace, Manjho.

Vishandas came to acquire 8,000 acres of land most of which was un-irrigated. He was exceptionally kind to his Haris and in years of crop failure, he would write off their loans and give them seeds, cattle and other things free of cost. Whenever he visited his lands, he would listen to the Haris' problems with attention and would solve them on the spot. No wonder the Haris loved him and were willing to lay down their lives for him.

BUSINESS CENTRES OF SETH VISHANDAS

When the Talpurs ruled Sindh, Seth Nehalchand had his business in Karachi but it closed down when he became a hermit. In 1869, Seth Vishandas set up his store across the road from the Kharadar police post. He dealt wholesale in foodgrains, oilseeds and cotton. Firewood and coal were traded by boat. The manager of the foodgrain section was Bhai Wadhuram Gangaram and the cotton side was looked after by Bhai Chanchal Das Bhelaram Aydasani. Other employees were Bhawan Das and his son Godhumal. Seth Kesho Das and Seth Sri Chand handled the wood and coal business whose manager was Bhai Lakhmidas Juggumal Lakhiani. In addition, Bhai Basarmal and his sons Bhai Jasumal and Abhrio Mal and Yaqub, Hashim and his son, Saleh were in the Vishandas workforce. The commission agent for the wood and coal trade was Paro Lalmal Belani who was succeeded by his son Hasanand. Bhai Wadhuram who had charge of the foodgrains department was followed after his death by three sons of his brother, Khealdas, Samandas and Isardas. In Bombay the cotton business owned by Seth Vishandas was looked after by M/s Khemji Wasram and sons.

Vishandas owned seven steamers — Fateh Salamat, Bunder Singhar, Behr Singhar, Karim

Shah, Nanak Shahi, Sada Saubhari and Pattan. These boats were used to bring logwood from Ketī Bunder and to do business with Bombay, Kathiawar and Malabar. Sometimes these boats would sail far out into the Arabian Sea. The man in charge of this fleet was Mohammad Ibrahim Mallah.

Vishandas also owned three big retail stores in Karachi. One store was in Empress Market, Saddar, run by Hiranand Khubchand Lakhiani. The second store in Kharadar was managed by Otel Bherumal Punjabi and the one in Keamari was under Khushiram and his sons Hasumal and Lokomal.

Paper to all business centres in Sindh was supplied Haji Ilyas and Haji Waheeduddin. Their wholesale store was named after their sons and was called Abdul Karim & Sons.

Vishandas had extensive business in Kotri. His business and residential houses were situated on the banks of the Indus. Kotri was a big centre for the timber trade. Vishandas had a fleet of six boats which transported goods Ketī Bunder to Sukkur and back. Saleh Mallah was in charge of this fleet. The business part was managed by Set Jashanmal Wasayomal who was assisted by the sons of Satramdas Tejomal, Ranomal and Samanmal and Munshi Kher Din Punjabi. Seth Jashanmal was a prominent figure in Kotri.

In the Manjho village, Vishandas had a huge house and a ginning factory called Gardi. The factory was managed by Teanomal Satramdas and Motiram Maghanmal Tekwani. They were succeeded by Gaudeendev's nephews Jugomal and

Dev Kishendas. Ghauth Dev was personal orderly to Vishandas.

Jesomal looked after the timber business under the supervision of Seth Keshodas and Seth Srichand. After Jesomal's resignation and Seth Keshodas's demise, the general attorney, Chelaram Korromal took charge. When the timber contracts were completed, Chelaram was appointed to look after the Seth's agricultural land. He worked with such devotion and honesty that Vishandas gave the title of diwan.

Vishandas owned about 8,000 acres of land. First Aluardev, followed by Devraj and then Chelaram looked after the Vishandas lands as general attorneys. The Kotri estate was managed by Sadhu Sheedi, Jogi Gadu, Mottio Niarri Munshi Haji Khan Zamkani and Karrao Haji Garrho Niarri. In Buttai, Jafar Lashari was in charge while the Mahal and Manjho lands were managed by Ummeed Ali Solangi.

In Vishan Nagar, Hyderabad, the Seth's ginning and pressing factory was managed by Karamchand Amarnomal and his sons, Lalchand, Bhagat Basarmal and Natharmal and Munshi Natharmal Odhodas. The Nawabshah cotton ginning and rice husking factories were managed by Motumal. Dharamdas and his brothers. The Badah rice husking factory and farmlands were run by Jethanand Tekchand and his nephew, Thakurdas Motumal. The factory in Ketu Bunder was managed by Thakomal. The Hyderabad timber depot was supervised by Seth Natthooram Vishandas. Vishandas had his headquarters in Vishan Nagar Hyderabad where Munshi Basarmal

Pesomal was his aide and Ailmal Pesomal and later Asandas Cholharam were his personal attendants.

HIS DESCENDANTS

Seth Vishandas had three sons and four daughters from his wife Bijhalbai. The sons were named Harchandrai, Srichand and Odhudas while the daughters were Gungalbai, Panjalbai, Motibai and Chandibai. Gungalbai was married to Mukhi Ghesimal Karamchandani for whom she bore three sons, one of whom, Seth Shevakram was for many years president of the Kotri municipality.

Panjalbai was married to Seth Chhatumal Hotchand of Alam Khan Marri village. The couple was issueless. Chandibai was married to Seth Tolaram Devjiram of Alhyar village. This couple, too, was issueless. Tolaram died in the 1935 Quetta earthquake. Chandibai was also injured. She died in Mathura in 1948.

The Reading Generation

1960 جي ڏهاڪي ۾ عبدالله حسين ”اُداس نسلين“ نالي ڪتاب لکيو. 70 واري ڏهاڪي ۾ وري ماڻِڪَ ”ٿُڙهندڙ نسل“ نالي ڪتاب لکي پنهنجي دورَ جي عڪاسي ڪرڻَ جي ڪوشش ڪئي. امداد حُسينيءَ وري 70 واري ڏهاڪي ۾ ئي لکيو:

آنتي ماءُ جڙيندي آهي اونڌا سونڌا ٻارَ
ايندڙ نسل سَمورو هوندو گونگا ٻوڙا ٻارَ

هر دور جي نوجوانن کي اُداس، لُڙهندڙ، ڪُڙهندڙ، ڪُڙهندڙ، ٻَرنڊڙ، چُرندڙ، ڪِرندڙ، اوسيئڙو ڪَندڙ، پاڙي، ڪاڻو، پاڇوڪڙ، ڪاوڙيل ۽ وڙهندڙ نسلن سان منسوب ڪري سگهجي ٿو، پر اسان انهن سڀني وچان ”پڙهندڙ“ نسل جا ڳولائو آهيون. ڪتابن کي ڪاڳر تان ڪڍي ڪمپيوٽر جي دنيا ۾ آڻڻ، ٻين لفظن ۾ برقي ڪتاب يعني e-books ٺاهي ورهائڻ جي وسيلي پڙهندڙ نسل کي وَڌڻ، ويجهڻ ۽ هِڪَ ٻئي کي ڳولي سَهڪاري تحريڪ جي رستي تي آڻڻ جي آس رکون ٿا.

پڙهندڙ نسل (پڻ) ڪا به تنظيم ناهي. اُن جو ڪو به صدر، عهديدار يا پايو وجهندڙ نه آهي. جيڪڏهن ڪو به شخص اهڙي دعويٰ ڪري ٿو ته پڪ ڄاڻو ته اهو ڪوڙو آهي. نه ئي وري پڻ جي نالي ڪي پئسا گڏ ڪيا ويندا. جيڪڏهن ڪو اهڙي ڪوشش ڪري ٿو ته پڪ ڄاڻو ته اهو به ڪوڙو آهي.

جهڙيءَ طرح وڻن جا پَن ساوا، ڳاڙها، نيرا، پيلا يا ناسي هوندا آهن اهڙيءَ طرح پڙهندڙ سُڻل وارا پَن به مختلف آهن ۽ هوندا. اُهي ساڳئي ئي وقت اُداس ۽ پڙهندڙ، ٻرندڙ ۽ پڙهندڙ، سُست ۽ پڙهندڙ يا وڙهندڙ ۽ پڙهندڙ به ٿي سگهن ٿا. ٻين لفظن ۾ پَن ڪا خصوصي ۽ تالي لڳل ڪلب Exclusive Club نه آهي.

ڪوشش اها هوندي ته پَن جا سڀ ڪم ڪار سهڪاري ۽ رضاڪار بنيادن تي ٿين، پر ممڪن آهي ته ڪي ڪم اجرتي بنيادن تي به ٿين. اهڙي حالت ۾ پَن پاڻ هِڪڙيءَ جي مدد ڪرڻ جي اصول هيٺ ڏي وٺ ڪندا ۽ غيرتجارتي non-commercial رهندا. پَن پاران ڪتابن کي ڊجيٽائيز digitize ڪرڻ جي عمل مان ڪو به مالي فائدو يا نفعو حاصل ڪرڻ جي ڪوشش نه ڪئي ويندي.

ڪتابن کي ڊجيٽائيز ڪرڻ کان پوءِ اهم مرحلو ورهائڻ distribution جو ٿيندو. اهو ڪم ڪرڻ وارن مان جيڪڏهن ڪو پيسا ڪمائي سگهي ٿو ته ڀلي ڪمائي، رڳو پَن سان اُن جو ڪو به لاڳاپو نه هوندو.

پَن کي کليل اکرن ۾ صلاح ڏجي ٿي ته هو وَس پٽاندڙ وڌيڪ کان وڌيڪ ڪتاب خريد ڪري ڪتابن جي ليکڪن، ڇپائيندڙن ۽ ڇاپيندڙن کي همٿائين. پر ساڳئي وقت علم حاصل ڪرڻ ۽ ڄاڻ کي ڦهلائڻ جي ڪوشش دوران ڪنهن به رڪاوٽ کي نه مڃن.

شيخ آياز علم، جاڻ، سمجھ ۽ ڏاهپ کي گيت، بيت، سٽ، ڀُڪارَ سان
تَشْبِيه ڏيندي انهن سڀني کي بَمَن، گولين ۽ بارودَ جي مدِ مقابل بيهاريو
آهي. اياز چوي ٿو ته:

گيت به چڻ گوريلا آهن، جي ويريءَ تي وار ڪرڻ ٿا.

.....

جئن جئن جاڙ وڌي ٿي جڳ ۾، هو ٻوليءَ جي آڙ ڇڻن ٿا؛
ريٽيءَ تي راتاها ڪن ٿا، موٽي منجهه پهراڙ ڇڻن ٿا؛

.....

ڪالهه هُيا جي سُرخ گُلن جيئن، اڄڪلهه نيلا پيلا آهن؛
گيت به چڻ گوريلا آهن.....

.....

هي بيت اُتي، هي بَمَ - گولو،

جيڪي به ڪٽين، جيڪي به ڪٽين!

مون لاءِ ٻنهي ۾ فَرَقُ نه آ، هي بيتُ به بَمَ جو ساٿي آ،

جنهن رڻ ۾ رات ڪيا راڙا، تنهن هڏ ۽ چَمَ جو ساٿي آ -

ان حساب سان اڻڄاڻائي کي پاڻ تي اهو سوچي مڙهڻ ته ”هاڻي ويڙهه ۽
عمل جو دور آهي، اُن ڪري پڙهڻ تي وقت نه وڃايو“ نادانيءَ جي نشاني
آهي.

پڻ جو پڙهڻ عام ڪتابي ڪيڙن وانگر رڳو نصابي ڪتابن تائين
محدود نه هوندو. رڳو نصابي ڪتابن ۾ پاڻ کي قيد ڪري ڇڏڻ سان سماج
۽ سماجي حالتن تان نظر ڪڍي ويندي ۽ نتيجي طور سماجي ۽ حڪومتي
پاليسيون policies اڻڄاڻن ۽ نادانن جي هٿن ۾ رهنديون. پڻ نصابي ڪتابن
سان گڏوگڏ ادبي، تاريخي، سياسي، سماجي، اقتصادي، سائنسي ۽ ٻين

ڪتابن کي پڙهي سماجي حالتن کي بهتر بنائڻ جي ڪوشش ڪندا.

پڙهندڙ سُئل جا پَن سڀني کي چو، چالاءِ ۽ ڪينئن جهڙن سوالن کي هر بيان تي لاڳو ڪرڻ جي ڪوڏ ڏين ٿا ۽ انهن تي ويچار ڪرڻ سان گڏ جواب ڳولڻ کي نه رڳو پنهنجو حق، پر فرض ۽ اٽل گهرج unavoidable necessity سمجهندي ڪتابن کي پاڻ پڙهڻ ۽ وڌ کان وڌ ماڻهن تائين پهچائڻ جي ڪوشش جديد ترين طريقن وسيلي ڪرڻ جو ويچار رکن ٿا.

توهان به پڙهڻ، پڙهائڻ ۽ ڦهلائڻ جي ان سهڪاري تحريڪ ۾ شامل ٿي سگهو ٿا، بس پنهنجي اوسي پاسي ۾ ڏسو، هر قسم جا ڳاڙها توڙي نيرا، ساوا توڙي پيلا پن ضرور نظر اچي ويندا.

وڻ وڻ کي مون پاڪي پائي چيو ته ”منهنجا پاءُ
پهتو منهنجي من ۾ تنهنجي پَن پَن جو پڙلاءُ.“
- اياز (ڪلهي پاتم ڪينرو)